

TEACHING ENGLISH IN SEMIOTICS

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with teaching english in semiotics and their sample applications in the language classroom. The foundation for semiotics must be laid with perception. The objects of perception are percepts. Percepts are not the material objects in the physical realm that the mind imagines (rightly or wrongly) that it is sensing. Visual percepts are patterns of area (shape, size, and position) and color over a two-dimensional field. Audial percepts are patterns of pitch and volume over time. The verbal and the non-verbal aspects of language teaching should not be kept separate. The use of signs, symbols and visual aids by the teachers help the enhancement of the learning capacity of the language learner both at cognitive and meta-cognitive levels as they listen and try to learn a foreign language component in the classroom.

Key Words : *Semiotics, language teaching methods, context, sign, symbol*

INTRODUCTION

Teaching of English has long been a difficult task . The present study intends to highlight the extent of Indonesian undergraduate students' motivation in learning English as a foreign language and the differences in instrumental and integrative motivation.

Increase in the numbers of language institutes and their students, also increasing interest of parents for their children to learn English can be a good evidence for recent value of English language in Indonesian. In this country English is taught at guidance schools, high schools and universities. Due to limitations in state schools, private language institutes have simply attracted an increasing number of interested learners including young children and adults. Many parents send their children from the age of six to learn English in these teaching centers.

SEMIOTICS

Semiotics, or semiology, is the study of signs, symbols, and signification. It is the study of how meaning is created, not what it is. Discussing about semiotics, it cannot be separated with the important keywords and their explanations as mentioned below.

Some brief definitions of semiotic terms, beginning with the smallest unit of meaning and proceeding towards the larger and more complex: (1) Signifier-any material thing that signifies, e.g., words on a page, a facial expression, an image. (2) Signified- the concept that a signifier refers to. Together, the signifier and signified make up the (3) Sign- the smallest unit of meaning. Anything that can be used to communicate (or to tell a lie). (4) Symbolic (arbitrary) signs- signs where the relation between signifier and signified is purely conventional and culturally specific, e.g., most words. (5) Iconic signs-signs where the signifier resembles the signified, e.g., a picture. (6) Indexical Signs-signs where the signifier is caused by the signified, e.g., smoke signifies fire. (7) Denotation-the most basic or literal meaning of a sign, e.g., the word "rose" signifies a particular kind of flower. (8) Connotation-the secondary, cultural meanings of signs; or "signifying signs," signs that are

used as signifiers for a secondary meaning, e.g., the word "rose" signifies passion. (9) Metonymy- a kind of connotation where in one sign is substituted for another with which it is closely associated, as in the use of Jakarta for the Indonesian government or of the arrow for a certain tribe power. (10) Synecdoche-a kind of connotation in which a part is used for the whole (as hand for sailor). (11) Collections of related connotations can be bound together either by (11a) Paradigmatic relations-where signs get meaning from their association with other signs, or by (11b) Syntagmatic relations-where signs get meaning from their sequential order, e.g., grammar or the sequence of events that make up a story. (12) Myths-a combination of paradigms and syntagms that make up an of-told story with elaborate cultural associations, e.g., the cowboy myth, the romance myth. (13) Codes: a combination of semiotic systems, a supersystem, that function as general maps of meaning, belief systems about oneself and others, which imply views and attitudes about how the world is and/or ought to be. Codes are where semiotics and social structure and values connect. (14) Ideologies-codes that reinforce or are congruent with structures of power. Ideology works largely by creating forms of "common sense," of the taken-for-granted in everyday life.

As Hodge and Kress (1988:26) claim, "Students of cross cultural communication know how often misunderstanding arises because of different assumptions in different cultural groups. Undoubtedly, it creates heavy demands to extend semiotics in this way, to include the description and analysis of the stock of cultural knowledge in a given society." Therefore, it can be said that semiotics not only helps learners to get the right message through semiotic signs to avoid cross-cultural failure, but also encourages the language teachers to play a critical role in the classroom. Semiotics is a very influential and essential field of study, because by making use of signs the learners are able to achieve a lot of information on various fields such as; literature, art, architecture, psychology, anthropology, philosophy, etc. In other words, communication is the primary concern of semiotics. In the language classroom, the teachers make use of semiotics symbols to lead to a better understanding of the topic. By doing so, the learners find the opportunity to study the topics of a given course in a more informative and enjoyable way. In order to provide accurate and clear comprehension in the target language, the teachers use a number of methods and techniques in the classroom. Most of these language teaching methods have semiotic elements in their nature.

SEMIOTICS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

There are semiotic signs which are actively used by the students and the teachers. Semiotic signs in language teaching help learners in a many respects. They not only present visual feedback for the students but also accelerates the learning process as well. Most of the language learning methods have semiotic elements. Situational language teaching is a term not commonly used today, but it is an approach developed by British applied linguists in the 1930s to the 1960s, which had an impact on language courses which survive in some still being used today. The theory of learning underlying the situational language teaching is behaviourism. It gives more importance to the process rather than the conditions of learning. According to Richards and Rodgers (1990:37) "Situational language teaching employs a situational approach to presenting new sentence patterns and a drill based manner of practising them." For Richards and Rodgers, the situation refers to the manner of presenting and practising the information (the structure of language) in the language classroom. "The situation will be controlled carefully to teach the new language material. . . . in such a way that there can be no doubt in the learner's mind of the meaning of what he hears. . . almost all of the vocabulary and structures taught in the first four or five years and even later can be placed in situations in which the meaning is quite clear" (Pittman, 1964:155-6).

For example, take one Semiotic Sign from any source, the students first of all observe the sign and name it, then learn the correct pronunciation of the vocabulary. With the teacher's immediate guidance the students are encouraged to talk about it. Everyday speech is emphasised in the Audio-Lingual Method. The level of complexity of the speech is graded so that beginning students are presented with only simple forms. The structures of the language are emphasised over all other areas. The syllabus is typically a structural one, with the structure for any particular unit included in the new dialogue. Vocabulary is also contextualised within the dialogue. It is, however, limited since the emphasis is placed on the acquisition of the patterns of the language. The underlying provisions of this method include five maxims to guide teachers in applying the results of linguistic research to the preparation of teaching materials and to classroom techniques:

1. Language is speech, not writing : (a) Emphasis on correct pronunciation from the beginning; (b) Listening and speaking before reading and writing; (c) Realistic, situational utterances from start; (d) Oral mastery first; reading/writing as reinforcers; time lag will depend on situation.
2. Language is a set of habits: Based on the assumption that language learning is a habit formation process, pattern drilling and dialogue memorisation are extensively used.
3. Teach the language, not about the language: (a) Revolt against the grammar-translation method; (b) Grammar for the teacher not the learner; (c) Learn thorough doing, through active practice; (d) Practice first, rules induced later.
4. A language is what its native speakers say, not what someone thinks they ought to say: (a) Emphasis on colloquial wealth of language; (b) Literary language at much later stage; (c) Traditional grammar mistrusted: style and register (occupational, emotive, informative) studied as well as language of attitude.
5. Languages are different: (a) Universal rules of transformational grammar mistrusted; (b) Contrastive studies of language encouraged; (c) Translation accepted when necessary or possible; (d) Translation a later skill with its own techniques.

A-LM enables the students to use the target language communicatively. In order to do this the students are believed to overlearn the target language, to learn to use it automatically without stopping to think. The students achieve this by forming new habits in the target language and overcoming the old habits of their native language.

In communicative language teaching, the instructional materials play an important role. "A wide variety of materials have been used to support communicative approaches to language teaching. Unlike some contemporary methodologies such as Community Language Teaching view materials as a way of influencing the quality of classroom interaction and language use. Materials thus have a primary role of promoting communicative language use." (Richards and Rodgers, 1990:79). The materials in communicative language teaching can be studied in three groups. They are text-based, task-based and realia. In the text based materials, depending on the context of study, to start the conversation, dialogues, drills, sentence patterns, visual cues, taped cues, and pictures are used actively. In the task-based activities, a variety of interactional patterns like, pair work, group work, games, role plays. In this respect, the cue-cards, pictures and the activity cards are actively used as the semiotic elements of the course. In terms

of realia, as is clear, the communicative language teaching requires the use of authentic and from life materials in the classroom. These materials can be in the form of; language-based realia, such as signs, magazines, advertisements and their symbols, graphics and statistics. (i.e. maps, pictures, charts, symbols)

The Direct method can also be applied with semiotics. The target language was used as the medium of teaching in very small classes. Lessons were made up of carefully-graded exercises consisting of question and answer responses. The basic idea behind Direct Method

was that language learning should be made to be as similar as possible to first language learning with an emphasis on oral interaction where possible and no translation between the L1 and L2. The method's over-simplification of the similarities between first and second language and the difficulties in its adoption to large classrooms are frequently cited criticisms.

CONCLUSION

In language teaching, the teachers use different methods depending on the goals and objectives of the course. Taking into consideration the students' needs, a variety of materials are used for different purposes in the language classroom. Besides their linguistic and pedagogic value, most of these materials have semiotic value. These methods help the language learner to get to know more about the social and cultural cues in the target language. Such symbols also fasten the cultural acquisition of the foreign language learner. For a better understanding in the target language, students and teachers should not only undergo training in language, but also a socialising experience.

According to Robinett (1978:113), "each word used in the EFL classroom is conditioned on the part of 'both speaker and the hearer' by each person's own particular, personal experiences and those experiences that are common to the culture of which he or she is a part." Thus, the language teaching classroom will be pervasively influenced by the target culture since "classroom discourse features encode cultural norms and beliefs." To illustrate, the pictures are used as semiotic signs and symbols to present the particular social aspects of the Western culture like; boyfriend/girlfriend, dating, double-decker buses and flags, etc. Moreover, the books, also comprise a set of symbols which tell the teacher and the students to take further action in the upcoming sessions

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